Meditation of Archbishop Pizzaballa: First Sunday of Advent, Year B

December 3, 2017

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Today, we begin a new liturgical year and it will be guided by the reading of the Gospel according to Mark. And we begin it with this passage (Mk 13:33-37) where the invitation to watch, to pay attention resonates over and over.

What does it mean to watch, and to what must we pay attention?

To get us into this experience, Jesus tells a short parable, wherein is related the account of a man who sets off on a journey and leaves his house to servants, giving each one his own task. To the doorkeeper is given the job of watching, which then is extended to everyone. One must watch so that on His return, at which time they do not know, the Master does not find the servants asleep.

It is interesting that the task of watching is given to the doorkeeper: in comparison with Luke 12:36, Jesus mentions explicitly that the doorkeeper has the task of watching in order to open for the master on his return, so that he can come back to his house.

The first consideration is that watching is not doing something unusual, no specific acts, but it is a way of being in life, an attitude of the heart: it is to be in life knowing that we are waiting for someone, it is to live knowing that by this life the Lord will enter, that we are on a walk towards a destination which is an encounter with Him.

On the contrary, falling asleep will not be anything but losing this awareness, living as if we did not wait for anyone: when this happens, the horizon closes on here and now, and all what we do becomes everything, becomes our entire life.

So, it is not a case that the liturgical year begins just with Advent and with this view on the future: it is important to begin from here, making it clear at once where we are going, where the Lord is taking us and where He awaits us.

Only with this view directed to the destination does the walk make sense, and it is possible to live life in a new way: one can look at worldly things not as to an absolute, that achieves all the aspirations of man; but even, on the contrary, as something of an accessory, which does not have any value.

Jesus, in the Gospel, avoids both positions: He affirms with certainty that the time of an encounter is an expected time, but He also says that this encounter cannot happen if life is not lived in watching and in expectation.

One can be in the world in a new way, because it is true that the conclusion is at the end, but it is also true that we already taste that which we believe in and towards which we are walking.

It is true that the Kingdom has yet to come, and still that Kingdom that we are awaiting is already in our midst. This land, this history in which we live, is the pledge of the future Kingdom, and so everything assumes a new meaning.

But how is it possible to preserve this view on the future?

How is it possible that the things of the world do not take over everything in our view, all our heart?

It is possible only with a view that sinks roots in the past, only if in the heart there is a memory of who we are, from where we've come and of Who has given us life.

It is possible only if we are cognizant of the gift we have received; it is this memory that creates the expectation, and those who do not remember, cannot expect anything.

For this very reason, in the Christian faith the term *watching* is synonymous with *celebrating.*

To celebrate means precisely to hold together, in this exact moment, the memory and the expectation, the pledge and its fulfillment.

To celebrate is to live in history holding lively the memory of the gift that makes us live and aware of the destination towards which we are walking; and it is to have an experience that, rightly feeding this awareness, the destination draws near to us and we to it.

This way of living in history makes the Christian a witness. A witness of that towards which we are walking and what we believe in. A witness of a new way of living in history, so this earthly life is not everything, and one can also lose it, just not lose the encounter with the Lord.

The witness is the "watchman" of which Jesus speaks: the watchman who remains at the door, keeps it open and sees, within and beyond the drama of life, the Lord Who enters. It is no accident that the first witness, the first martyr of the Church, St. Stephen, dies saying that "I see heaven open" (cf. Acts 7:56): Stephen watches and pays attention to the Lord Who comes, Who is faithful, Who lives in history, and Who awaits him beyond.

Let's begin Advent with this same view.

+ Pierbattista

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